

Relationships: the heart, brain and courage to pursue (Part 1)

I wanted it so bad. I wasn't thinking clearly. I had to have it, so I didn't really pursue any counsel and was foolish in my pursuit of it. I heard only what I wanted to hear and looked past all the red flags that shouted, "stop"! I didn't handle things wisely, I was clueless but didn't know it. At the time, it seemed good. How did it turn out so badly? After it was all said and done, there I was, embarrassed and upset. I felt stupid.¹

I'm talking about a guitar I used to own and the way I went about purchasing it. BUT this description is true of many relationships with the opposite sex.

Maybe *you're* in a relationship, you want to be in a relationship, you're hurt from past experiences and scared of what a relationship might turn into or you simply have no idea how to pursue a relationship according to Scripture, and then a few of you might have no desire to be in a relationship....

How is it done? What does it look like? How should a Christian date in a way that honors God and the person you're dating? What are the physical, emotional and mental boundaries a Christian should set while developing an intimate relationship before marriage?

What's this courtship thing all about?

Can I or should I *date*? When? What should my relationships with the opposite sex look like?

How can I prepare myself to pursue a more serious relationship?

The world's model of relating to the opposite sex is predominantly characterized by lust and selfishness before marriage – taking on the privileges of marriage *without* the commitment of marriage.

Emotional pain, isolation from parents and friends, negative comparison, sexual sins and offending God are just a few of the consequences associate with *the model*.

The Biblical model of relating to the opposite sex is characterized by self-control and self-restraint before marriage (2 Tim. 2:22, 1 Cor. 6:18-20, Gal. 5:16-24), in the process, avoiding unnecessary hurt and by God's grace, developing an ever-deepening romance in marriage.

Colossians 1:9-12, 3:15-17; 1 Thess. 4:1-8; 1 Peter 1:13-16

You're on a journey of discovering God's will for your life, and relationships should be no exception to that.

¹ This story adapted from *Doing Things Right, A Matter of the Heart* by John Ensor. This book helps define the biblical roles of a man and woman in a clear and concise way.

- You have to be willing to explore the pages of Scripture to find your answers.
- You have to be willing to follow the road that's laid out in Scripture.
- Along the way, I believe God will give you the heart, brain and courage to honor him in this area of your life.

1. The *heart* behind the pursuit

Proverbs 14:12 tells us, *“There is a way that **seems** right to man, but it's end is the way of death.”*

One of the biggest dangers you and I face today is *death pretending to be life*.

What's God's view on all of this?

God is not some “meany” throwing down rules so that all our “fun” is ruined.

Do we really believe God has our best interest at heart when He shows us the way to live through His Word?

Or do we think He's in some way, holding back things we'd be better off having? *“You will not surely die!”*

The gospel confronts and cures our suspicion of God and builds trust...

So we have to begin with a right understanding of the gospel.

This way, we carry with us, God's heart for us – and we know that when we encounter things that rub us the wrong way in His Word, we still submit because we know (in light of the gospel), that He loves us!

The goal tonight is to begin to understand God's heart – God's goal – for relationships and adopt that heart as our own!

Many of you are at a crossroads.

You will have to decide if your relationship with Christ, your commitment to live for His glory is going to define how you do this.

I want you to do this right!

For some of you, this is about preparing for the future so that when the time comes to pursue a relationship, you won't stand there looking up in the air saying, “durrrr...”

For most of you, this is about preparing for the present!

When you pursue a *purposeful* relationship – one that honors God – you are *“Pursuing a friendship with the possibility and discovery you're meant to be married. It's above all, purposeful. It's not without risk and should involve the authority God has placed in your lives. It's simply a way to be careful with the other person's heart while opening up your lives to each other.”*

It will require three essential things:

1. Faith 2. Communication 3. Intentionality

“The sexual revolution of the 1960’s and 70’s radically altered the sexual landscape of our nation....

The expectation is that people will live together prior to marriage. It’s the “norm.” From 1978 to 2008 the number of people living together rose from 1 million to 5 million.”²

Compatibility? Serious difficulties.

You exist in a world unlike any other in the history of mankind. It’s perversion runs deep into the fabric of our culture...we must evaluate what we see happening around us through the lens of Scripture.
Satan is a liar. God’s plan is still the best out there!
Purity before marriage and faithfulness in marriage is God’s plan.

Is there a difference between a date and dating?

A date could be two people spending time together, going out for coffee or a meal after church, whatever...to get to know each other in a non-sexual manner.

The word “dating” isn’t worth arguing over.....

BUT dating as is practiced by non-Christians is not acceptable for Christians.

Talking, sharing a meal, spending time together is not a sin.

It could actually lead to courtship and then to marriage.

1 Timothy 5:1-2 Paul tells Timothy to treat Christian single women like sisters.

The dating SYSTEM today is a *“try the shoe on and see if it fits”* mentality.

It’s recreational

“I’m just having fun” mentality

We like the freedom of being casual in our relationships, but we’re really being robbed!

It’s usually unsupervised

Accountability and submission to any authority is seen as archaic.

It’s predominantly led by feelings

This is the *“whatever feels right”* mentality. Please don’t follow your feelings until you’ve tested them. Sin will always try to separate our feelings from commitment. Commitment to God, commitment to the authority in your life. Commitment to remain pure, and to walk in holiness.

It’s usually rushed into/ lacks self-control

“I felt so comfortable” “We just really connected” – God is in no rush!

We’re driven by the hundreds of *two-hour* movies we’ve watched!

Impatience causes us to lose in the long run (Proverbs 19:11; 25:28).

It’s usually driven by “fantasy”

² Mark Driscoll’s book “Religion Saves and Nine Other Misconceptions. This book has one of the best chapters on dating I have read. I highly recommend it.

Are your emotions based in *reality*? “I make \$200 a week at chuck e cheeses, but I think we can make a work!” “I pay for my cell phone and car insurance ok....”

FANTASY

In pornography, love is idealized (presented) as sexual satisfaction without intimacy, friendship, sacrifice, suffering – it’s fake and selfish and idolatrous.

OR there can be the temptation to look to your girlfriend or boyfriend to fulfill what only God can fulfill what only God can! If you look to a person to be your all-consuming delight you will inevitably set that person up for FAILURE! As a God-substitute!

It can hinder the God-given potential of your single years

If you’re *not* in a relationship, our culture makes it seem like you’re “missing out on something.”

Courtship: helping redefine the concept of dating

A single man pursues a single women under the oversight of her father (family). Approval, oversight, care, direction. Deut. 22:13-21; Num. 30:3-5

This can get legalistic and just plain weird.

We need hearts devoted to Jesus above all...

Marriage is not the goal of courtship (a purposeful relationship) – treating each other with holiness and sincerity, honoring God and making a wise decision about marriage – *that’s* the goal.

What if dad isn’t a Christian, her family lives in Russia, her dad isn’t alive, I’m a well-established older single...

Community and accountability is key.

I’m attempting to envision you for something much greater than infatuation, or the two-month relationship, or you ladies giving yourself away to a guy who won’t be your future husband – sharing something with him that isn’t rightly his.

My goal? That you would walk away saying, “*Here’s what I know: I want to honor God in my relationships with the opposite sex, so I’ll look to His Word and discover what living in PURITY and INTENTIONALITY looks like, believing that God has my best interest in mind...I’m going to trust God to mature me for that day when I am ready to pursue and be pursued!*”

It’s never going to be “risk-free” – but when done in light of what we discussed, I believe it can and will honor God.

The first question should *not* be “How should I date/ court?” “Give me the ten steps to successful courting!”

Here are some very basic questions you should begin to ask yourself.

1. Am I pursuing the most important relationship of all, my one with Jesus? And is this relationship driven by my own desire to know God rather than the thinking, *“I better start loving Jesus, so Carissa and her dad will start loving me”*?

What’s the motivation behind your relationship with God?

Mark 12:29-31

Love God. Love Neighbor. This should spill over into every relationship we have.

2. Do I accept that marriage is God’s idea and is meant for my holiness before happiness? Happiness is involved but marriage will not “complete you” – if you think that way you will be depressed in marriage. First for holiness (sanctification), second for happiness....

3. Am I actively preparing myself for a GODLY relationship?

This means putting yourself in the best position possible to respond to God’s leading you on toward *marriage*.

Why do you think you should have marriage in view?

It’s God’s gift, God’s idea...and it’s a good one!

- For some of you, that might mean finishing college.
- For others, it might mean identifying a sense of direction for your life.
- For some it means forming specific disciplines in your life.

4. Have I been a friend first? Am I willing to involve her family (father, church, trusted friends)?

5. Am I living under the authority God has placed in my life? Do I love the local church and believe in accountability and community?

1 Peter 5:5-7

6. Am I living selfishly or is my life marked by considering and serving others before myself?

7. Am I evaluating whether someone I’m interested in would make a good husband/ wife? Am I overlooking a potential spouse because of the mythical husband or wife I have pictured in my head hasn’t come around? Do I have a list of what I want my spouse to be like, look like, dress like? If so, why?

We’ll look more at this next month.

8. Have I thought through how much physical affection I will express in a *“purposeful relationship”*?

How much physical affection would you want your future wife to have with the guy interested in her right now?

Ephesians 5:3 *“not even a hint of sexual immorality”*

The real question is not *“where’s the line”* but *“when’s the time”?!*

Don’t act married until you’re married.

What you do prior to marriage will have consequences within marriage.

1 Cor. 6:9, 18-20

When a relationship is built on the worship of God – that spiritual intimacy will enable all other intimacy to happen without shame and without sin!

Holiness and purity is the standard. We get our boundaries from the Bible.

Don’t compromise either person’s purity.

It’s Ephesians 5 kind of living/ See 5:15-17

Walk in love, walk in light, walk as wise, walk in understanding

Nothing does more damage to our walk with God or our relationship with the opposite sex as sexual temptation and sin.

It’s really difficult to make decisions (to see through the smoke) when having a sexual relationship with someone or when investing romantically...

2 Corinthians 1:12 sums up what every Christian couple should be able to say at the end of a season of relationship.

Don’t buy into the lies of our culture.

KEEP living for Jesus when life gets a little hard or uncomfortable.

BELIEVE this is possible and the better.

PRAY for God’s heart behind the pursuit!

Questions for discussion

1. Why is it so important to believe that God has our best interest at heart when he shows us how to live through Holy Scripture - especially when it comes to this area of life?
2. Are you ever tempted to think God is withholding something you would be better off having?
3. What are some things about our culture's form of dating that should concern you?
4. Why do you think it's so important to submit your desires to the authority God has placed in your life? Like your parents? Or your pastors?
5. How has the message adjusted your perspective on this issue? What do you agree with? What do you struggle with understanding?
6. What are you going to walk away with? In other words, what did you learn from this message?